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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS I2

SUBJECT: RAMADI CONUNDRUM: COMMERCE AMID TERROR

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford, for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. From State Embedded Team Ramadi. Iraqi Police employees working for the Governor painted for PolOff earlier this month a bleak picture of intimidation and paralysis on the streets of Ramadi. Terrorists use criminal enterprise to fund their jihad. While the people hope for a greater Iraqi Security Force presence, there are new threats against the Iraqi Police. A senior officer noted many of the Ramadi elite are maintaining a low profile. He predicted tribal allegiance will play the strongest role in the upcoming provincial elections. Talk of doom and gloom inside the Governorate Center belies a thriving souk and heavy traffic - both commercial and private. End Summary.

¶2. (C) SETOff queried a group of the Governor's Personal Security Detail about the state of the insurgency in the ravaged capital of Anbar province. On February 19, several of the Emergency Battalion of the Iraqi Police, which is made up largely of the governor's relatives and serve as his PSD, said Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or takfiri extremists were widespread. They suggested AQI operatives are engaged in criminal activity to fund their jihad. This includes extorting bribes at border crossings and black marketing benzene at Ramadi's gas stations. They also post spies at hospitals and clinics.

¶3. (C) The young men asserted that the terrorists had murdered the brother (and bodyguard) of the governor's assistant for legal matters, lawyer Arif al Alwani, the week of February 12. (Note: Shortly after the assassination of his close associate, the Deputy Governor, in October 2005, Arif went underground. Arif had visited the Governorate Center only once shortly before his death. End Note.) The group described Ramadi as 'disgusted' with the terrorists for destroying the city's telephone network, but noted that few were fighting back. They posited that the people were waiting for an Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police presence on the streets. The Governor's detail also claimed a handbill found in the souk advised "killing one IP is worth the murder of seven Americans". (Other contacts could not confirm the existence of such takfiri propaganda.)

¶4. (C) Another Governorate Center employee, Colonel Fahdel Makhilif Dayaa al Assafi al Dulaimi, Director of Internal Affairs, spoke of armed gangs of takfiri extremists in close proximity to the seat of government. He noted several of the Anbar Security Committee, including former General Sa'ab al Rawi and Sunni Waqf Director Sheikh Dhaher al Ubaidi, are restricting their movements. He suggested the people were dissatisfied with Sa'ab, Dhaher and others who led last years' intense engagement with the Coalition Forces because they produced no tangible benefits. Fahdel observed that

AQI's intimidation campaign targeted all figures associated with the Iraqi Islamic Party. He added that the party had 'lost face' by failing to deliver improvements since their election to the Provincial Council January 30, 2005. Fahdel predicted that tribal leaders would play a greater role in the upcoming provincial elections.

15. (C) Comment. A local unit commander noted on February 19 that the Ramadi souk was thriving. PolOff must rely on military colleagues' observations because it is deemed too dangerous for SETOff to travel far beyond the confines of the Governorate Center. One officer estimated the population of Ramadi's market district at over 50,000 and observed that his Humvees could hardly pass through the streets narrowed by crowds, including children. SETOff observed heavy traffic in commercial and private vehicles on the main arteries into the capital and west, suggesting private enterprise continues to flourish against an unstable and tense political backdrop. End Comment.

KHALILZAD